A treatise of the newe Indyes, with other newe souereynes: and the highwaymen, at the plate of the sea, and the rest of the

Title page and colophon from A treatise of the newe Indyes, translated from the Latin by Richard Eden (London, 1555).
The Library of The Historical Society of Pennsylvania is rightly celebrated for its unexcelled collection of eighteenth century Pennsylvania imprints, but perhaps it is not realized that the Library also includes a number of highly important Americana of the period of discovery. Among these latter items there has lain on our shelves, unnoticed and unsung, the earliest book on America in the English language, a book, too, of the very greatest rarity and of great geographical importance. It is entitled *A treatyse of the newe India, with other new founde landes and Ilandes, aswell eastwarde as westwarde as they are knowen and found in these oure dayes, after the description of Sebastian Munster in his boke of universall Cosmographie*. It is a small octavo volume of 102 leaves, printed in Gothic letter in London by Edward Sutton in 1553, and translated from the Latin by Richard Eden.

I say advisedly that this is the first book on America in the English language. Actually, passing mention had been made of America in several tracts previously, particularly in an English pamphlet issued in Antwerp a generation earlier: *Of the new landes and of ye people founde by the messengers of the kynge of portyngale* (Antwerp, John of Doesborowe, c. 1520, S. T. C. 7677), known only from a fragment in the British Museum and an imperfect copy in the Huntington
Library. But this Antwerp pamphlet was mostly concerned with the
Portuguese in India; it merely referred inaccurately to Vespucci’s
supposed discovery of "Armenica" in two voyages from 1496 to 1499,
and then went on to describe the morals (or lack thereof) of the
aborigines. In fact, it was of so little geographical value that Richard
Eden in his preface to the 1553 volume soundly condemned it, and
pointed out the crying need for an adequate book in English on the
great discoveries of the Renaissance. His translation of Münster was
per contra quite a respectable attempt to fill that need, although not
as good as Eden’s own subsequent works. In effect, then, it is a
defensible claim to make, that this little volume is not only the first
book on America printed in England, but is also the first *real* book
about America printed in the English language.

For England, the year 1553 was a symbolic one. From that date
sprang the great impetus of Tudor expansion which was to result in
the formation of both the British Empire and the United States of
America. In that year, backed by the Duke of Northumberland and
old Sebastian Cabot, the first voyage sailed for China and the East
Indies by the Northeast Passage; in that year, too, backed also by
the Duke of Northumberland, the first English voyage sailed for the
Guinea Coast of West Africa. The search for the Northeast Passage
got no farther than Russia, it is true, but the impetus of reaching the
Orient grew from it, until it gained fruition in the formation of the
Honourable East Indian Company in 1599–1600, and in the success-
ful voyages by the Cape of Good Hope in the early seventeenth
century. As for the Guinea voyages, they developed into the West
Indian raids of Drake and Hawkins, and, finally, into the colonization
of Virginia and New England. In other words, in that single year,
1553, England developed a northeast-southwest axis of colonial ex-
pansion, which was ere long to widen to every point of the compass.
Viewed in this light, Eden’s publication was as appropriate as it was
timely, while his dedication to the Duke of Northumberland, to
whom more than to any other man the genesis of this expansion was
due, was a highly significant gesture.

In his attempt to bring the story of Renaissance discovery before
the English reading public, Eden was compelled to go to foreign
sources, and to this end he made his translation of that part of
Sebastian Münster’s *Cosmography* which dealt with the East and
West Indies. Sebastian Münster (1489–1552) was a rather ponderous German professor, who with typical Teutonic pomposity and thoroughness had published in 1544 his *Cosmographia Universalis*, a very substantial work of some fifteen hundred pages. As the greater part of Münster's book dealt with Europe, Eden passed it over, and confined himself solely to such material as concerned the new discoveries. For this material Münster had gone on his part to still earlier sources, in particular to Fracan da Montalboddo's *Paesi Novamente Retrovati*, a book which was the earliest collection of voyages, and which had been a popular favorite on the continent of Europe since its first edition in 1507. For his Columbian material, Montalboddo had gone, in his turn, to the *Libretto* of Peter Martyr of 1504, a tract based on Martyr's own conversations with Columbus, which contained accounts of Columbus' first three voyages and of the voyages of Alonzo Niño and Vicente Pinzon. Montalboddo had got his Vespucci material from the latter's *Mundus Novus* (1502, and later editions), and had assembled his section on the Portuguese voyages to Africa and India from reports sent home by Venetian officials in Lisbon. Münster lifted all this from Montalboddo, condensed it, and added a considerable section on China (from Marco Polo), and Magellan's voyage (from the narrative of Pigafetta, who was a participant). It was from this compilation and recension of Münster's that Eden made his translation.

The nature of the resulting work may be seen from the table of contents, which appears in the 1553 edition in an arbitrary order, but which is here arranged to correspond with the text.

The first part:

Of the newe India, as it is founde and knowen in these oure dayes.
Of the Adamant stone, otherwise called the Diamant.
Of the Kingdoms & cities of Narsinga [the kingdom of Vijayanagar in South India] & Canonor [Cananor on the Malabar Coast].
Howe the Elephantes in India are prepared to the warres.
Of the beaste called Rhinoceros.
Of Calicut, the most famous markette towne of India.
Of the maners of the Indians of Calicut.
Of Pepper and other spyces which growe in the Region of Calicut.
Of the byrdes and beastes which are found in the Region of Calicut: and of the wyne of the tree.
From whencse all kyndes of spyces are brought to the cytie of Calicut.
Of the Iland of Zaylon [Ceylon], & of the cinomome tree.
Of the cytie of Tarnasseri [Tenasserim on the lower Burmese Coast], and of the maners of the cytezyns.
Of the excellent cytie and Kingdom of Pego [Pegu], and Bangella [Bengal].
Of the Ilande of Sumatra, or Taprobana.
Of the Ilande of Bornei [Borneo].
Of the Ilande of Java.
Of the Ilande of Madagascar.
Of the Ilande of Zanzibar.
Of the two Ilandes in which men and women dwell asunder.
Of the mightie Empyre of Cathay, subject under the dominion of the great Cham or Cane, Emperour of Tartaria.
Of certayn Provinces subiect under the dominion of the great Cham.
Of the Province of Mangi [Manzi].
Of the Region of Tangut.

The second part:

Of the Newe Ilandes, howe, when, and by whom they were found.
Of the two Ilandes Johanna [Cuba] and Hispana [Haiti].
Of the Canibales, which eate mans flesh.
Of the maners of the inhabitantes of Hispana.
How Christophorus Columbus, after that he had founde the newe Ilandes, returned to Spayne: and preparing a new navie, sailed agayn to ye Canibales.
How Columbus the Admiral, passed many Ilandes, and what chaunced to him & his in that viage.
Howe the Spanyardes abused the submission of frendship of the inhabitauntes of the Ilandes.
Howe the Portugales soughte newe Ilandes in the East partes, and howe they came to Calicuta.
Howe Magellanus by a strayght or narow arme of the Sea, sayled by the Weste into the Easte to dyvers Ilandes, where also he was slayne.
Howe the Spanyardes came to the Ilandes of Molucca, & of the people with great hanging eares.
The third navigacion of Christophorus Columbus.
How Pinzonus companion of the Admiral, sought newe Ilandes.
The foure navigacions of Americus Vesputius to the Newe Ilande.
The fyrste viage of Vesputius.
The second viage of Vesputius.
The thyrde viage of Vesputius.
The fourth viage of Vesputius.
Howe the Kyng of Portugale subdued certayne places in India, and of the ryche cytie of Malacha [Malacca].
Of the Ilande of Medera [Madeira], and the fortunate Ilandes, otherwyse called the Ilandes of Canaria [the Canaries].

It will be seen from the foregoing that Eden brought the names and deeds of Columbus, Vespucci, and Magellan before the British public; he also mentioned Albuquerque, and described the voyage of Vasco da Gama, although he did not actually mention that navigator by name. In consequence, this little volume is indeed the foundation stone of English geographical literature, and is the first of the apostolic succession of collections of voyages which did so much to stimulate maritime adventure in Tudor and Stuart days. First came Richard Eden, then Richard Willes (1577), Richard Hakluyt (1582, 1589, 1598–1600), and finally Samuel Purchas (1625); among these men little was left unsaid about early voyages.

Richard Eden, the man who broke the long silence in England on the new worlds, had been born of good family about 1520. After going to Cambridge, he had served as a Treasury official, and at the time that he translated Münster’s Cosmography was probably William Cecil’s private secretary. From boyhood he had been interested
in geography and astronomy; he became intimate with Sebastian Cabot, and in the preface of his first book he revealed his familiarity with Gemma Frisius' globe and with the writings of Peter Apian, as well as with the standard geographical writers of the past. Emboldened by the success of his 1553 translation, he published a far more elaborate work two years later, entitled *The Decades of the newe worlde or west India* (S. T. C. 645–648), which was a book of even greater geographical importance, albeit nothing like the bibliographical rarity of the Münster. In fact, to be guilty of a Hibernicism, one might say that the later volume is a very common rare book, although no copy has yet reached The Historical Society's collections. In the preparation of his second work Eden went directly to the best sources he could find: Peter Martyr for the Columbian voyages and West Indian affairs down to 1520, Ovieto y Valdes and Lopez de Gomara for later Spanish exploration in America, and Pigafetta for Magellan; while he also included the Cabot voyages to Newfoundland and the very recent English ventures to West Africa. After the publication of this volume, Eden turned his attention to even more practical matters, and translated several navigational manuals (that of Martin Cortes from the Spanish and that of Jean Taisnier from the French). At the time of his death in 1576 he was engaged in an enlarged edition of his *Decades* of 1555; this was brought out the following year by his disciple Richard Willes. Such was the useful activity of England's first geographical writer.

The Society's copy of *A treatyse of the newe India* was acquired in the last century by Frederick D. Stone, Librarian from 1877 to 1897. It would appear that he bought it from an English bookseller at the incredible bargain price of five guineas; it might easily now bring five figures! The rarity of the volume is evident from the fact that only six copies can be traced: (1) the British Museum, (2) the New York Public Library (the Lenox copy), (3) the John Carter Brown Library in Providence, Rhode Island, (4) the William L. Clements Library at Ann Arbor, Michigan, (5) the Free Library of Philadelphia (the Britwell-Jones-Elkins copy) and (6) The Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Nothing is known of the provenance of our copy, but it is in excellent condition in every respect, and is indeed one of the greatest treasures in our very great collection.

*Devon, Pa.*